

# Fifty Years of Parish Life

July 18, 1853, to July 18, 1904

Delivered in  
St. John's Church, Tuckahoe  
in the City of Donkers

By the Rector  
Rev. J. W. Buckmaster

Sunday, July nineteenth, Nineteen hundred and four

# Fifty Years of Parish Life

On November 10th, 1898, we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the erection of this building. We celebrate to-day the 50th anniversary of the incorporation of this parish. The following record is copied from the Minute Book of the Vestry:

TUCKAHOE, IN THE TOWN OF YONKERS  
WESTCHESTER Co., July 18, 1853

On this day, the following persons of full age, belonging to the Church and congregation worshipping in this House of Public worship in the said town, called heretofore St. John's Chapel, Tuckahoe, in which Divine Worship is celebrated according to the rites of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New York, met together at their said place of worship, pursuant to notice duly given in the time of morning service on two Sundays previous thereto, for the purpose of incorporating themselves as a Religious Society under the acts of the Legislature of the State of New York.

Present: Christian Dederer, Elias C. Bowne, Caleb Fowler, Abijah G. Morgan, Wm. R. Dederer, Lancaster Underhill, R. J. Bush, Peter U. Morgan.

The Rev. Charles Jones was, by a majority of said persons, called to preside over the said meeting, and Peter U. Morgan was appointed as Secretary thereof.

The notice calling the said meeting was then read in the following words:

"Notice is hereby given that a meeting of the adult members of this congregation will be held in this place of public worship, known hitherto by the name of St. John's Chapel, Tuckahoe, Westchester Co., New York, on Monday, the 18th- day of July, 1853, at 9 o'clock A.M., for the purpose of incorporating themselves as a Religious Society for the worship of Almighty God, according to the rites and usages of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the State of New York, and for the purpose of electing two Wardens and eight Vestrymen.

(Signed)

CHARLES JONES  
Late Minister of St. John's Chapel, Tuckahoe."

It was resolved then, on motion, resolved that the persons here present do proceed to incorporate themselves as a Religious Society in communion with the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, and that the said church and congregation be known in law by the name and title of the Rector, Wardens and Vestrymen of St. John's Church, Tuckahoe, in the Town of Yonkers in the County of Westchester.

The said meeting then proceeded on to motion to choose two church Wardens and eight Vestrymen of the said church, when the following persons were duly elected:

*Wardens.*

JOHN BOWNE,

CHRISTIAN DEDERER

*Vestrymen.*

ELIAS C. BOWNE,

JOHN A. HAMMOND,

CALEB FOWLER,

WM. R. DEDERER,

BENJAMIN LENT,

A. J. MORGAN,

PETER U. MORGAN,

BENJAMIN VERMILYA.

On motion, it was then resolved that Monday in Easter week be fixed as the day on which the said officers of the Church Wardens and Vestrymen shall annually hereafter cease and their successors in office be chosen.

A certificate of incorporation having been prepared, was presented, containing the above proceedings, which was signed by the Chairman of this meeting and by Elias C. Bowne and Caleb Fowler, and was witnessed by Peter U. Morgan and John Hammond, and the said Peter U. Morgan was requested to prove the due execution of the same, and cause it to be recorded by the County Clerk.

(Signed)

CHARLES JONES, Chairman.  
P. A. MORGAN, Secretary

and also by

ELIAS C. BOWNE,  
CALEB FOWLER.

Thus the congregation was started as an independent organization. From 1789 to 1853 the successive Rectors of St. John's Church, Yonkers, ministered to the spiritual needs of the people. Now the daughter church is deemed old enough and wise enough to set up housekeeping for herself. She assumes the responsibility and girds herself for the new tasks.

On the day of incorporation, July 18, 1853, the Wardens and Vestrymen held their first meeting, elected a Secretary and Treasurer and adopted this resolution:

*“Resolved,* That the Rev. Charles Jones be elected Rector of St. John's Church, Tuckahoe, and that he have the use of the Parsonage buildings and glebe attached to said church, and the annual salary of four hundred dollars for two years.”

The church was admitted into union with the convention of the Diocese in September, 1853, and delegates were annually thereafter sent to represent the Church. We must remember that in 1853 this was exclusively a farming neighborhood. There was no frequent or early communication with New York City. There were large farms and few houses. The country parson was expected to be a sort of farmer. The original glebe of St. John's Church, Yonkers, contained two hundred acres, and so when Parson Jones was to have a parsonage, a glebe, and four hundred dollars annually, it was deemed no ungenerous provision for his support. The air was bracing, the water was good. If fond of walking, he would find pedestrian exercise beneficial to health, and if he owned a horse he could make the more calls and become the closer friend and counsellor of his people.

The Rev. Charles Jones is described as a man in middle life, stout, with florid complexion, showing marks of the well-developed stalwart Englishman.

The Rev. Charles Jones remained as Rector for about five years. He was followed by the Rev. Augustus St. Clair, who was called for one year on a salary of two hundred and fifty dollars, with the use of the parsonage and glebe and the privilege of keeping a school. During his Rectorship the parsonage was accidentally destroyed by fire, April 23rd, 1860. He was followed by the Rev. David Doremus, who served one year. After his departure there was a suspension of regular services until the Rev. Angus M. Ives was called in the summer of 1865.

The history of a church is much like the history of a family, or of an individual. There are helps and hindrances. There are victories and defeats. There are mistakes and disappointments. There are advances and retreats. Old friends die or move away. The unexpected sometimes happens and the expected fails often to materialize. The year 1865 marked the turning of the tide. The Parish was older, wiser, than it was in 1853. It was a privilege to have the Church reopened, to join again in the familiar service, to gather the children for instruction. With new energy the congregation rallied around the new Pastor, and new life came with the new consecration.

For fifteen years he went among his people in loyal, devoted service, until the end of service and life came on the 21st day of March, in the year 1880.

His body rests in the churchyard. A tablet in the church recalls his memory, and resolutions of the Wardens and Vestrymen attest their appreciation of his worth.

Angus Morrison Ives was born in Mobile, Ala., Feb. 26, 1835. He was baptized the same day by his father, the Rev. Caleb Smith Ives. His father was appointed as a missionary to Texas, and settled at Matagorda, where he built a

church. In the spring of 1849 the family came North and settled in Tinmouth, Vt., where the Rev. Caleb Ives died July 27, 1849. Mr. Angus Ives entered Trinity College, Hartford, in 1852, graduating in 1856. He entered the General Theological Seminary in 1857, graduating in 1860. He accepted a call in 1860 to Newcastle, Pa., where he remained one year. He taught for one year in the public school of Greenwich, Conn. In the following year he established a boarding school for boys at Summit, N. J. In 1862 he took charge of the parishes of South Salem and Lewisboro, in Westchester County. In 1864 he took charge of St. John's Church, Wilmot, and also established a private school for boys at New Rochelle. June 21, 1865, he accepted the rectorship of St. John's Church, Tuckahoe, in connection with the work at Wilmot, and moved to Tuckahoe in 1867, where he opened a private school.

Public services were held in Bronxville and also in the Viele Chapel, north of Jackson Avenue.

Mr. Ives was the first Master of Marble Lodge of F. and A. M. of Tuckahoe. Mr. Ives was twice married. His first wife was Miss Marion Wallace Jones of New York, and his second was Miss Minnie Holmes of Tarrytown.

Full of labors, honored and beloved, he entered into his rest, in his forty-sixth year, in 1880.

The fifth Rector was the Rev. Samuel B. Moore, who was in charge from 1881 to 1884. He is still living, a resident of Asbury Park, N. J. He was followed by the Rev. Charles Ferris, who remained for about one year. He (Mr. Ferris) is living at Tryon, N. C.

The Rev. James B. Nies was in charge about one year. He is living in Brooklyn. The Rev. W. Trimble came in 1888 and resigned in 1892. He died suddenly in 1896. The present Rector has been in charge since September 15, 1892.

During the past fifty years, according to the records of the Parish Register, there have been 335 baptisms, 183 confirmations, 70 marriages and 182 funerals. The communicants have numbered 338.

We must remember that the church is still semi-rural. The church is still surrounded by farm land, and more or less distant from the centers of population. Visitors from New York and elsewhere have been surprised and also charmed with the restfulness of our surroundings. As someone saunters through the churchyard a hush comes over the spirit, and the thoughts wander into the realms of quietude.

I have been much interested in the inscription on the headstones marking the graves of the departed. The simple life of the long ago helped to prolong the days of many beyond the three-score years and ten, supposed to mark the limit of earthly pilgrimage. The oldest grave of an adult in our churchyard is the grave of Hannah Smith, who died in 1805, in her 79th year. The oldest grave of a child is the grave of Lawrence Bowne, who died in 1800 in his third year. Many graves are unmarked, but of those marked by headstones the inscriptions reveal the fact that many passed hence "full of years." Of fifty-seven aged persons, ten were upwards of 60 and under 70 years of age; seventeen were upwards of 70 and under 80 years of age; twenty-five were upwards of 80 and under 90 years of age; and five were upwards of 90. The oldest person was Sarah Odell, who died in 1863, in her 95th year. Of these fifty-seven persons, forty-six were born prior to the year 1800, and nineteen of the forty-six before the Declaration of Independence of the United Colonies. Does not a lesson come to us out of the past, in this time of hurry and rush, from the graves of these faithful ones who served God and their generation, and entered into their rest, which they had earned and merited? Some one said to John Gilpin on his runaway horse, "Where are you going, John?" and the response came back, "How do I know." And similar responses could be made by many to-day.

Some weary themselves in the search for pleasure; even their vacations are times of unrest – their recreations are often distracting and enervating. To the question, "Where are you going?" the response comes back, "How do we know." There are persons apparently living without a purpose or a motive; they come back exhausted from every quest. They soon learn that the eye is not satisfied with seeing, that the ear is not satisfied with hearing. If they are heaping up riches it worries them to think that they cannot tell who shall gather them. It is not necessary to be destitute of ambition or of enterprise, but it is a mistake to lose the enjoyment of what we have in an unwise attempt to imitate the style of those who can spend more merrily because they have more.

A cemetery does not teach us to be idlers and dreamers, but to live a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty; doing with all our might what our hands find to do, redeeming all our time, getting the most out of life for ourselves and putting the most into life for others.

On the day of incorporation, July 18, 1853, the first business transacted was the selection of two Wardens and eight Vestrymen to serve for one year.

During the past fifty years this church has had eight Wardens – John Bowne, Jr., served for two years, Christian Dederer for thirteen years, Elias Cooper Bowne for twenty-seven years, Nathaniel Valentine for three years, William D. Smith for eight years, William H. Underhill for eighteen years, Charles R. Dusenberry (now in office), for twenty-six years, and Richard Thompson (now in office), for four years.

The church in fifty years has had fifty-three Vestrymen. The names will be given in alphabetical order: Elias Cooper, two years; Zeb. Brower, one year; Clement Bramley, one year; Thomas H. Braisted, three years; Richard G. Bennett, three years; Joseph P. Brundage (now in office), three years; Clarence H. Brown (now in office), three years; James C. Courter, two years; Burr Davis, one year; Charles R. Dusenberry, eighteen years; William R. Dederer, twelve years; Henry Dederer, three years; George Dederer, two years; Thomas Dunn, fifteen years; Alexander Forbes, seventeen years; Andrew Finly, six years; Caleb Fowler, nine years; William J. Fee, five years; John A. Hammond, fourteen years; Samuel S. Horton (now in office), twenty-eight years; Caleb A. Ives (now in office), fourteen years; Robert Johnson, one year; John A. Kemp, sixteen years; Benjamin Lent, two years; Peter U. Morgan, three years, Abijah Morgan, five years; A. G. Morgan, four years; Charles Nordquist, M. D., eight years; Cornelius M. Odell, two years; Henry B. Odell, two years; Charles T. Pratt, one year; William Roberts, one year; Samuel M. Raisbeck, twenty-four years; William D. Smith, eight years; Charles Isaac Slater, one year; Charles H. Sloat (now in office), six years; William Stevenson (now in office), four years; Wilbur S. Underhill (now in office), twenty-eight years; Henry M. Underhill, twenty years; Nathaniel Valentine, one year; Benjamin Vermilya, two years; C. Edward Waring, five years; Frank A. Williams (now in office), two years; Albert Young, one year [added in pencil: George Killeffer 1 year; S. B. Jones, 15 years].

These facts I have gathered from the “Minute Book of the Vestry,” kept by successive clerks.

Who have been the clerks of the vestry? There have been but four: John A. Hammond served for fifteen years, from 1853 to 1867; Charles Nordquist, M.D., served for six years, from 1868 to 1863; Samuel M. Raisbeck was clerk for two years, 1874 and 1875; Wilbur S. Underhill has held the office for twenty-eight years, from 1876 to the present time.

Great credit is due to these gentlemen for the accurate way in which the transactions of the vestry have been recorded, and the doings of the parish preserved for present and future reference. The office of church treasurer is not sinecure. There is much labor connected with the office. There must be an accurate entry of all receipts and disbursements. There must be vouchers for moneys paid out. The treasurer must arrange for the prompt payment of all demands. The treasurer is an agent, acting for others, and others must see to it that funds are in hand to meet liabilities as they become due. In the past fifty years the church has had but eight treasurers: Peter U. Morgan was treasurer in 1853 and 1854; Elias C. Bowne served in 1855; George W. Underhill served eight years, from 1856 to 1863; Charles R. Dusenberry served nine years, from 1864 to 1872; John A. Kemp served in 1873, 1874, and 1875; William H. Underhill served nineteen years, from 1875 to 1894; Caleb (*sic*) A. Ives served six years, from 1894 to 1899, and Charles R. Dusenberry, the present treasurer, from 1900.

It is the policy of the vestry to meet expenses monthly, and it incurs no new obligations unless the money is in sight to meet them. The property of the parish is free from debt, and protected by insurance. We have an endowment of \$3,000 invested in bond and mortgage at six per cent. The cost of the church when ready for use in 1798 was 203 pounds, 4 shillings, 11 pence. The first enlargement was in 1847, when the north end was extended fifteen feet. In 1870 a recess chancel, vestryroom and porch were added. In 1871, a small pipe organ was placed in the gallery. In 1880, stained glass windows were added, the interior of the church was painted in colors, the pews cushioned and the floor carpeted, by Mr. Elias C. Bowne, at an expense of about \$1,200.

June 6th, 1888, Mr. Charles R. Dusenberry presented to the vestry a deed for the lot on which the present parsonage is built, under the direction of the Building Committee – Samuel S. Horton, Robert Thedford, Albert O. Young, Wilbur S. Underhill and Richard G. Bennett. The cost of the parsonage was secured by gifts of money from friends within and without the parish.

In 1896 a new organ-room and a choir-room were built at an outlay of \$892. In 1897 the new organ was used for the first time on Palm Sunday, April 11th. The cost of the organ, \$1,175, was secured by the personal efforts of Wilbur S. Underhill, for over twenty-five years organist.

In recognition of his many years of gratuitous service, and of his efforts to improve the music of the church, the parish presented him with an elegant "Loving Cup," suitably engraved, after a musical service in the church on Sunday evening, June 30, 1901. Mr. Dusenberry has been Superintendent of the Sunday-school for upwards of thirty years.

We have learned that Mr. Dusenberry was married on September 21, 1853, and unless he invites all his friends to his golden anniversary we will have to arrange to give him a surprise party.

In the life of a parish, a period of fifty years is a long period to range over, with its many church services, sermons, with its confirmations, marriages and funerals, the coming and going of rectors, the coming and going of parishioners. Numerous incidents have to be passed over. Too many crowd on us for recognition. We only can express our gratitude for all who in the past, in any way, helped to establish this church and extend its influence. We salute the faithful women who have taught in the Sunday-school, helped in the choir, and engaged in many forms of benevolent work. Our one social organization, the Legion, has accomplished much through its monthly meetings, during the past fourteen years, in maintaining good feeling and in raising money for improvements in the church and rectory. It is the spiritual work, after all, that is most important. All church ministrations have a common end to form Christian character. "We are to be builded together, for an habitation of God, through the spirit."

The building of 1798 was framed with hewn timber. We are using it and have added to it. Let us not forget the robustness and the simplicity of the pioneers, heard by the saintly Elias Copper, whose voice, over a century ago, sounded in these parts the Gospel of the grace of God.

We cannot forecast the future. We cannot tell what changes will come to this neighborhood in the next fifty, in the next twenty-five years, but we can perform our task to the best of our ability, so that those who follow us shall say, "They loved mercy. They did justly. They walked humbly with their God."